DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 059 RC 017 712

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TITLE Involving Parents in the Schools: A Process of Empowerment.
PUB DATE 25 Jan 90
NOTE 55p.; Paper presented at the University of California Symposium on Race, Ethnicity, and Schooling (Davis, CA, January 25, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Isolation; Elementary Education; Hispanic Americans; Lower Class Parents; *Mexican American Education; Parent Associations; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Power Structure
IDENTIFIERS *California; *Empowerment

ABSTRACT

A 4-year ethnographic study in Carpinteria, California, examined the school district's parental involvement activities for their effectiveness with lower-class Spanish-speaking parents. Research at three elementary schools included observations of traditional activities, such as parent-teacher conferences and open house, and non-conventional activities, such as the Bilingual Preschool Parent Involvement Program, as well as interviews with parent participants and nonparticipants, teachers, and administrators. Conventional avenues to parent involvement were closed to many parents because of their lack of cultural knowledge about schools' norms. In contrast, some non-conventional activities encouraged parent participation by being culturally responsive to the families' experiences and need to learn about the schools and by including parents in decision making. As a result of their active participation, some Hispanic parents organized themselves into a group in order to become more knowledgeable about the school system and parental rights and responsibilities. The "Comite de Padres Latinos" group (COPLA) engaged in collective "critical reflection" that was central to the empowerment process. The parents' awareness of their shared experience became the basis for collective action as they sought to establish a network of systematic linkages between the school and parents. Three power-based conceptualizations of parent involvement are defined based on conventional, non-conventional, and COPLA activities in Carpinteria. This report contains 24 references. (SV)

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Involving Parents In The Schools: A Process of Empowerment

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This paper was presented at the University of California, Davis Symposium on Race, Ethnicity and Schooling, January 25, 1990.

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Note

* The term Mexican American refers only to the group of Mexican descent who comprise most of the Spanish-speaking population. This has certainly been the case up until recently when other immigrants have arrived from different Spanish-speaking countries.

The term Latino is used in this paper to refer to Mexican Americans and Central and South Americans in Carpinteria. Although the leadership in the parent groups has been Mexican American, the parents have used the term Latino to refer to themselves as a way of including the Central and South American immigrants who have recently immigrated and whom them consider to have unity with respect to the issues of parent involvement in the schools.

Abstract

Arguments in favor of parental involvement in their children's educational process have been replete in the education and social science research literature. The need to create culturally congruent home and school settings and to equalize the power balance between parents and educators makes this topic an imperative for research, policy and practice. This four-year study in a California school district and community examined parental involvement for its effectiveness in helping underclass Spanish-speaking parents to participate more fully in their children's schooling. The findings show that conventional avenues for involving parents in school are closed to many parents because cultural knowledge is required in order to participate. Parents are expected to participate in traditional activities according to the school's norms, but disenfranchised parents are not taught about the school organization. This study shows how non-conventional activities engaged parents to participate in their children's education because they were culturally responsive to the families' experiences and their need to learn about the schools. Although the legitimization of non-conventional activities may be a way to reorganize traditional activities for effective communication between the home and school, the challenge for parents is that the schools have little incentive to involve them in the schools. The empowerment process embraced as an alternative by the Carpinteria community alters this situation as parents organized to support each other and cooperate with schools to work together and make the children their mutual interest.

Involving Parents in The Schools: A Process of Empowerment

We have observed a very Newtonian approach to formal Education since its inception. Not only have academic subjects been artificially compartmentalized in classroom instruction but the role of the family in children's education has been relegated to a position separate from the school. In many cases the family has been considered a competition for the school. However, if we can conceive of the school and the family as compatible institutions in support of students' academic accomplishments, we can begin to examine the means by which the two relate to one another.

A component of Family-School relationships is the issue of "Parent Involvement." The dynamic of parent involvement has been a critical factor in the history of schools in this country. Contemporary research has revealed the need for parent involvement to promote children's success in school (Bloom, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Comer, 1984; Dean, Cochran, 1983; Griffore & Boger, 1986; Lareau, 1989; Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982). Parents of ethnically and linguistically different students, however, often fail to participate in the schools in numbers comparable to other majority group parents (Clark, 1983; Comer, 1984; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Laosa, 1983). A number of anthropology of education studies have concluded that the culture of the school differs from that of the home for many underclass children. When a student from a culture or social group different from the white mainstream group enters school in the United States, schooling becomes a discontinuous process for a number of reasons including language,

values, and practice differences (Spindler, 1974; Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1982; Phillips, 1983; Watson-Gegeo, 1975).

Sociologists studying issues in education including Hansen (1988) and Lareau (1989), have pointed out social class differences in the way that parents relate to schools, showing the match of values between middle class families and the schools. Ethnically different families living in low socioeconomic conditions often face sustained isolation from the school culture, which can lead to miscommunication between parents and school. Systematic isolation of families and groups from participation in the mainstream culture only leads to resentment, apathy and eventual disempowerment of those affected. Schools facilitate in the exclusion of students and parents by (consciously or unconsciously) establishing activities which require specific knowledge and behaviors about the institution based on cultural ideas about the nature of schooling ideas which are never made explicit. The absence of appropriate sociocultural knowledge precludes participation in the formal school activities and means isolation for many parents especially those who have not been schooled in the U.S. and who are limited in English proficiency.

In the Carpinteria study, I set out to examine the nature of parent involvement in activities in the home and school, including the three elementary schools with programs from preschool to sixth grade. Although the two secondary schools were not the foci of the research, much of what occurred in the parent involvement affected parents with students in the junior and high schools in later stages of the study. Described in this paper are the home-school linkages constructed by the school and the parents in their effort to relate to one another in support

of the students. Justifications are made to make sense of power relations often referred to as "cultural conflict" between the schools and the Spanish-speaking community, which represents over 40% of the total population. When parents do not participate in the schools, children face negative consequences. Barriers are created between children and the teacher as well as between the parents and the school. Cultural adjustment for culturally different students is a complex process, and in the less successful cases, maladjustment creates obstacles to children's success in school (Trueba, 1989). Where sociocultural congruency exists between home and school settings, children have a greater chance of succeeding in school. Parents who are knowledgeable about the school's expectations and the way in which the school operates are better advocates for their children than parents who lack such skills. Less knowledgeable parents face problems in relating with schools relative to children's development and school success. This was noted by Bronfenbrenner's hypothesis which states:

> "The developmental potential of a setting is enhanced to the extent that there exist direct and indirect links to power settings through which participants in the original setting can influence allocation of resources and the making of decisions that are responsive to the needs of the developing person and the efforts of those who act in his [and her] behalf."

I suggest that "power" undergirds the knowledge required on the part of parents to deal with schools. This is a marked departure from the deficit model explanations that in the past have portrayed parent involvement of linguistic and culturally different parents. Deficit perspectives depict inactive parents in the schools as incompetent,

unable to help their children because they have a different language or belong to different ethnic groups or are just not interested. In this sense, power means the capacity of some persons and organizations to produce intended, foreseen and unforseen effects on others to accomplish results on behalf of oneself. Power also results in the capacity of some persons and organizations to control access to valued resources. Thus we note that power does not, in itself, imply a value; the value is in the way that it is utilized to control others or to assert one's rights. (This definition is adapted from work by Barr, 1989; Dahl, 1961; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

The parent involvement process in Carpinteria has been one of a power struggle on one level, and a shared power process on another level leading to the empowerment of the Latino* community which comprises nearly half of the total population. The empowerment process in the community dealing with educational issues described here is grounded in research and theory addressing the following social, cultural and political assumptions. (See Allen, Barr, Cochran, Dean, Greene, 1989; Barr, 1989; Bernstein, 1982; Bourdieu, 1977; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Comer, 1980; Dreeben, 1986; Freire, 1973; Lareau, 1989; Ogbu, 1978; Trueba, 1989)

1. Underrepresented groups including women, ethnic and linguistically different people are assigned unequal status in society.
2. All individuals have strengths.
3. A truly democratic society is organized to provide all people of diverse backgrounds choices and opportunities to exercise that power.
4. An understanding of the history of a given community or group, including the language, values and traditions associated with role

allocations, is indispensable to determine appropriate strategies for reducing inequality.

5. Learning new roles provide people with access to resources and the learning of those roles occurs through participation in those settings.
6. Collective critical reflection is an integral process in participation and empowerment by bringing concerns to a conscious level.

For the purposes of this paper a definition for empowerment encompasses four dimensions of power including the notions of collective process, critical reflection, mutual respect and win-win.

Empowerment is an ongoing intentional process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. People become aware of their social conditions and their strengths: they determine their choices and goals. Action is taken to unveil one's potential as a step to act on one's own behalf.
Implicit here is consciousness of and responsibility for one's behavior and willingness to take action to shape it as desired through a social process (Allen, Barr, Cochran, Dean, Greene, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Freire, 1973).

Parent Involvement In Carpinteria Schools

Carpinteria, California provides an opportunity to examine the empowerment process because it represents a classic case of a variety of dimensions of power distributions. This community lies about twenty-

five miles south of Santa Barbara. Up till the late 1950s and early 1960s the community was ethnically segregated and one of the schooled was designated as the Mexican school. The gradual social and economic movement of many Mexican American* families has been evident over the years as families who lived in little shacks in the old part of town in the forties moved across the freeway to the newer section. However sometimes more than one family has finances and shared a house. While many Mexican American families have improved their socioeconomic conditions, informants believed that issues like childcare, housing for low-income people, education that will discourage students from dropping out, and medical services for low-income families remain challenges for the entire community to solve.

Of the nearly 12,000 residents, Whites represent 67%, Mexican Americans 31%, Asian 1%, Black .5% and other including American Indian .5% (U.S. Census, 1981). The Latino population is comprised of mostly Mexican Americans who date back in California to when Mexico ruled to more recent immigrants from Mexico. There also appears to be an increasing number of immigrants from Central and South America. With respect to language, the Latino English-only speakers, bilingual speakers and limited - English speakers. The majority of this group (70%) is English speaking and has lived in the community for three or more generations. Although the census refers this population as "Spanish", the participants identify themselves as "Mexican" and "Mexican American" and "Latino".

The majority of the immigrant Mexican community live in the west part of town where there are many low income rentals. Soaring rents in the area have created a devastating financial burden for most renters in

Carpinteria but are especially difficult for the working class Latino families since their incomes are less than the Anglos. For example, the family yearly mean income was between $1,000-$6,000 higher for the Anglo family than the Mexican family.

In two-parent families most often both spouses are employed full-time in an unpredictable labor market. The average family income for a Latino family with three children who had Spanish as their dominant language was less than $13,000 in 1987, according to a personal survey conducted with Mexican families. In essence, where these families live depends largely on their income, which in turn depends on their employment, which is heavily influenced by their school attainment. The census data about Carpinteria revealed that the Mexican population was overrepresented in the fields of farming and fishing as compared to their Anglo counterparts. For example, the total employed Anglo group over 16 years of age was 4,257 compared with 1,668 Mexican persons. Of that employed group, almost 30% of the Anglo were managers or professionals while less than 5% of the Mexican group occupied comparable positions. The data on high school educational attainment of white persons over 25 as reported in the U.S. Census showed that 35% of the total white population of 5,343 in that age group graduated from high school while in the Mexican group 27% graduated out of a total of 1,539. Regarding college completion, the Anglo group had 17% of 5,343 total in that age group as compared with 5% of the total 1,530 Mexicans who completed.

Working in Carpinteria

Agriculture, fishing, an aluminum factory, small private businesses, and the public school district comprise the primary places of

employment for Carpinteria residents. Some people, however, work out of town in Santa Barbara or Ventura. Although employment is variable for working class Mexican people due to the non-permanent nature of the work; agriculture provides the most available employment for many. This is not field-work; it is primarily at small independent ranches and in local nurseries that produce orchids.

Approximately 48% of the bilingual and Spanish-only sector are employed in service jobs or as laborers. They are largely the immigrant Mexican group. Another statistic indicates that some Mexican people (8%) have become professionals and are employed in education in the Carpinteria School District or in small businesses.

Schooling in Carpinteria

Carpinteria School District serves a total of just over 2,000 students. Of this enrollment, approximately 35% are Hispanic and of that percentage, the limited English-speaking students comprise 40%. The ethnic makeup of of the school central district administration is Anglo with the exception of one Mexican American male who coordinates the Migrant Program and one Mexican American principal.

Carpinteria has six schools, four elementary, one junior high, and a high school. One of the elementary schools is actually in Creekside, a community adjacent to Carpinteria; it is administered by the Carpinteria School District. The elementary schools are divided by grades as follows: Maple School has preschool-2nd grades; Marina has 3rd-6th grades; Jackson has 3rd-6th grade and Creekside has 3rd-6th grades serving primarily students in the Creekside community.

All the schools in Carpinteria receive State and Federal funds, requiring the development of a yearly school plan. This school-site plan

guides the programs which the school executes during the year. Principals must develop programs in accordance with the regulations of the special funds that supplement the school district's fiscal allocations for instruction and other programs. The process of obtaining input to develop the school plan varies between schools. Essentially, the school principals obtain the input from parents, teachers and specialists to write the various components for the plan. They call meetings or survey the different sectors to assess the needs and opinions on reading, language arts, and math curriculum, as well as teacher education, bilingual education and parent education.

Each school deals with the specific requirements from the following state and federal program funds: Chapter I, Economic Impact Aid (EIA), State Preschool, School Improvement Program, Special Education, and Migrant Education. The planning and coordinating of the specific requirements for expenditure of these funds with the programmatic needs that treat the students' identified educational problems constitutes a large part of the principals' responsibility. They solicit assistance through input from the teachers and parents to the extent that they help to determine the curriculum utilized in the classroom and events that require expenditures from the State and Federal funds.

Research Procedures

This study examined the nature of parental involvement activities in Carpinteria schools, encompassing practices and processes and their methods, if any, for including Spanish-speaking parents in the schools. At the time the study began, the community definition of what contexts and conditions constituted "parent involvement" was vague; through ethnographic methodology the nature of the activities and their meaning

for the different parties was defined. "Activities" is defined as the avenue by which parents are brought to participate in their children's schooling. These could be formal events scheduled by the school or formal and informal settings that organize activities involving parents. In general, activities either promote or discourage parent involvement in school and home on their children's behalf.

In two of the three schools selected as the focus of the study the principals spoke Spanish, as did the teachers in the bilingual program from the preschool to the sixth grade. In spite of the fact that the district had instituted a bilingual program, the schools had problems involving the Latino parents in the schools. The concern on the part of the school district about the lack of participation of Latino parents in the schools stemmed from the fact that 40% of the student population is working class Latino and of that percentage, the majority are Spanish-speaking.

School parent-involvement activities were observed, as were various contexts of interaction in the home and school settings. These included conventional activities like parent-teacher conferences and school-site councils, as well as less conventional activities like the Bilingual Preschool Parent Involvement Program. Interviews were conducted with parents-participants in each of the settings observed and with parents who had been invited to the various meetings but did not attend. Interviews were also conducted with teachers and administrators in the elementary schools who worked with Mexican- American Spanish-speaking children and their parents. All interviews were recorded and transcriptions made. Additionally, a total of one-hundred fifty-seven activities were observed involving parents and teachers. The activities constituted the major unit of analysis over a four year period.

Means of Parent Involvement

Educators expect parents to participate in their children's schooling by communicating with the schools and by helping the children in the home. To actively participate in the schools, Spanish-speaking Latino parents must become informed about the school system and how it functions as well as their parental rights in obtaining information about their children and their responsibility for supporting them through school. The means by which parents learn to participate in the school varies. The family's successful experience in the educational system is dependent on the family's education experience and the level of training which school districts provide. The school district provides various formal avenues through which teachers and parents can communicate and participate. They hold annual Open House events and, biannual Teacher-Parent Conferences. Each school also has a school-site council which is comprised of parent representatives elected each year. Decisions about the school budget, fundraising and curriculum directions are brought to this body by the principals. Other activities specifically serving the Spanish-speaking parents are linked to federal programs (e.g. the preschool program) which required some parent involvement the preschool program. Such programs differed in their objectives to involve parents as compared to the traditional Open House activity. For example, the preschool had as its objective involving parents in their children's education by teaching parents how to help their children in developmental tasks at home in the context of their daily family activities, such as learning how to measure solids and liquids while helping with a cooking activity.

Parent Participation in Conventional Parent Involvement Activities

The annual Open House held in the early part of the Fall typically attracted more parents (both White mainstream and Spanish-speaking parents) than any other event sponsored by the schools. For one evening in Spring, 1988, schools invited the parents to meet the teachers and to listen to a presentation about the classroom curriculum. Teachers addressing the Spanish-speaking parents conducted the event as did their mainstream counterparts except that they spoke in Spanish. Children's best work was displayed on the walls, and in some classrooms special projects were placed on top of the children's respective desks. Parents sat at their child's desk and listened to the teacher present the textbooks used in the various subject areas. Classroom rules and the school's discipline policies were also presented. Parents were given an opportunity to raise questions about the presentation but in most cases no more than one or two parents asked questions. The most common question asked dealt with homework policies. Teachers made explicit the policy that homework would be sent home nightly in cases where children did not complete their work in the classroom. Parents were urged to assist their children at home. Some teachers also reminded the parents to set fixed rules in the home so that children knew they had to do their homework at a specific time and go to bed at an early hour.

Teachers unanimously agreed on the importance of parental participation for student achievement and expected parents to attend the annual activities. Most of the teachers reported that they had a high rate of parent involvement during Open House. The school principals reported an attendance rate of 90% of the Latino parents in most of the bilingual classrooms in the elementary schools.

Although parents who attended the event enjoyed meeting the teachers and viewing their children's work on display, they felt that the event did not offer sufficient time to discuss their children's progress. Teachers recognized that the event was not designed for lengthy conferences but merely to acquaint the parents with the child's academic setting for that year. Teachers expected parents to make a special appointment to discuss in detail any concerns referring to their child. As stated by one teacher:

> "Even though we don't expect much of these parents during the Open House we think that the parents need to be more concerned during the rest of the year and not rely on us [teachers] to do all the outreach."

Parents who did not reach out to the school during the year waited for one of the biannual teacher conferences that took place during the Fall and Spring. Parent/teacher conferences brought out the majority of Spanish-speaking parents. Teachers made every effort to schedule the conferences with parents at an hour convenient to them since many parents worked long hours. If parents were scheduled to attend the conference with the teacher at an hour when they were at work, most requested permission to leave work without pay in order to attend the meeting with the teacher.

Twenty minutes were allocated for each conference and they were conducted in Spanish for all Spanish-speaking parents. Typically the teachers showed parents files with the students' work as samples of their progress. Parents generally listened as exemplified in this following illustration:

Teacher = T; Mother = M

T: Miguel (pseudonym) no me da muchas problemas. Se porta bien pero no pone mucha atención cuando les estoy dando instrucciónes a todos y luego el hace mal el trabajo.

Miguel isn't much of a problem. He is well behaved but he doesn't pay attention when I'm giving instructions to everyone and so he does his work wrong.

M: Pues yo le digo que ponga atención a su maestra pero no se más que hacer porque yo no estoy aquí todo el día para veerlo.

Well I tell him to pay attention to his teacher, but I don't know what more to do cause I'm not here the entire day.

The teacher communicated to the parent that Miguel needed to pay attention to her when she gave instructions and the mother interpreted that to mean that she should do something to help out the situation. The mother's sense of helplessness is conveyed through her explanation that she has told her son to pay attention and she doesn't know what more to do. In an effort to clarify the situation the teacher told the parent:

T: Yo creo que ustedes deben de preguntarle a Miguel "¿Cómo te fue en la escuela?" Todos los días cuando llegue el a la casa. Así el sabe que es responsible por su comportamiento y que usted está al tanto de su trabajo en la escuela todos los días.

I think that you should ask Miguel, "How did you do in school?" everyday when he gets home. That way he knows that he is responsible for his behavior and that you're on top of his schoolwork everyday.

M: Sí comprendo maestra y eso es precisamente lo que hacemos el papá de Miguel y yo. Es que llegamos como a las 6:00 p.m. del trabajo y

luego cenamos y nos ponemos hacer la tarea después. Pero todos los dias nosotros platicamos con el sobre su trabajo. Así es que no sé que más hacer.

Yes teacher, I understand and that's exactly what Miguel's father and I do. We get home about 6:00 p.m. from work and then we eat dinner and then we help him with his homework. So, everyday we talk with him about his work. So, I don't know what more to do.

T: Pues yo tampoco se porque aqui ya saben ellos que deben de poner atencion.

Well I don't know either because here they [the students] know that they have to listen.

M: Pero maestra, si usted que es la maestra aquí no sabe porque Miguel no quiere poner atención que más esperan que hagamos nosotros en la casa?

Well, if you who are the teacher here don't know why Miguel doesn't want to pay attention what do you expect us to do at home?

T: Pues ojalá que después de esta plática se componga la situación.

Well hopefully after this talk we will see the situation improve

In this communication between the parent and teachers we note the distance between what the teacher believed to be important, which was the idea of reporting to the teacher about the student's behavior and what she perceived to be their role in the home. The teacher did not attempt to understand the parent's dilemma about Miguel. She failed to negotiate with the home experience. The parents wanted to help Miguel more than they had but they were led to believe that they should know how to work with Miguel: so if Miguel was still not doing well then it must be that he and his parents were at fault. For the teacher, the

purpose of the of this conference was to present the problem while the parents wanted to resolve it. They felt incompetent as they were told simply to "try harder" to help Miguel.

The teacher's suggestions to the parent were accepted by Miguel's mother because she believed that they were doing their best to help him with his schoolwork. However, as the meeting continued, the parent appeared to be frustrated by the problem posed to her by the teacher, who said that in the classroom they had established rules implying that Miguel was not paying attention because he did not want to, therefore his lack of motivation should be corrected in the home setting by the parents. The problem appeared to be one of blame and defensive postures and it remained a problem without resolution when the meeting ended. Given this interaction, the problem is not one of commission but one of omission. That is, the teacher and the parent engage in a battle of blame as to who was responsible for helping Miguel learn to pay attention in class while issues of curriculum, motivation, instruction and learning disabilities were not addressed by the teacher.

According to teachers the twenty-minutes allocated for the conference was sufficient time to report to the parents about the teacher's performance. They believed that the conference period was a mere formality in which the parents received a report about the child, "like a personal report card" as one teacher described it. Parents, however, complained that the time they spent in conference was not nearly enough time to discuss a student's learning problem. Both teachers and parents agreed that the time was not nearly enough in cases when they had to discuss a student's social maladjustment or underachievement. Teachers were frustrated with the limited time

because they expected that the parents would have been in contact with them prior to the conference, while the parents believed that the teacher should take more time to help them understand their child's learning problem and suggest how to help him or her. One parent's comments epitomized the sentiments of many parents with this statement:

> Yo creo que las conferencias [con maestros] son buena idea porque nos da una idea de como van los niños en sus estudios aunque uno mismo sabe cómo van si les ayuda uno en su tarea. Pero me parece mal que los maestros no nos enseñan cómo les podemos ayudar a nuestros hijos cuando tienen problemas. No mas nos dicen que les ayudemos.
>
> I think that the [parent/teacher] conferences are a good idea because we get a good sense about the progress that our children are making, although, we do know how they're doing if we help them with their homework. But I think that it's bad that the teachers don't teach us to help the kids. They just tell us to help them.

Expectations as to the outcomes of parent/teacher contacts differed depending on the perspective and need. Seemingly, the parents needed to make their contact with the teachers count as much as possible while the teacher wanted their contacts with the parents to be a reminder of what they believed that the parents should already have known. The problem was that in many cases neither party had initiated communication outside of the parameters of the conventional activities. Some parents believed that it was the teacher's responsibility to contact them if the child was not doing well in class and the teacher expected the parents to contact them to check on the child's progress. The gap in communication on a more frequent basis made the infrequent

parent/teacher interactions somewhat ineffective and in many cases both parties were left wanting more.

As a way of maintaining frequent communication with the parents, a few of the teachers instituted a weekly report system by which the parents were informed about the students' academic progress. Teachers differed on the way that they reported. Usually, they sent home a half sheet form with a place to fill in the name and the child's behavior. Parents read the reports and responded in various ways. Some parents accepted negative reports at face value and blamed the child for not doing well or praised her if the report was positive. Other parents were disturbed that the written reports were ambiguous and failed to provide sufficient information regarding the student status and contacted the school. A parent of a high achieving student commented, "Es imposible saber que es lo que quieren decir cuando solo marcan aqui [en esta linia] que va bien y mientras mi hija tiene problemas entendiendo lo que esta haciendo en su tarea." It's impossible to know what they mean when they only mark here [on this line] that everything is fine when my daughter has trouble understanding her homework. This parent challenged the teacher's report by going to the classroom and requesting clarification, reporting that her child was having difficulty in completing the homework and asking why that was not reflected in the report.

That some parents acted to challenge the teachers' reports and others accepted them raises the question as to how some parents knew to act on the issue while others did nothing about the reports whether they were positive or negative. The teachers believed that it was the administration's responsibility to train parents to work with their children at home. Indeed the principals held sporadic workshops for

parents on various topics once or twice a year. Most of the workshops offered by the schools, however, were held in English only, which excluded the Spanish-speaking parents. On occasion a school would have a series of four workshops for disciplining children at home which were conducted for two separate groups in Spanish and English. For the most part, schools had only one or two workshops during the year on topics such as "communicating with your child" and "helping your child with math". The major problem with the isolated workshops on topics decided on by the teachers with no input form the parents, was that they were poorly attended, with only four parents as an audience in some of them; in addition, there was never any follow-up for the parents on the topic. Spanish-speaking parents generally enjoyed the workshops. For most of the parents who attended, the topic was a reinforcement on subjects they learned in other settings. One father explained about the workshop he attended on how to communicate with his children:

> "A mi me gusta asistir a éstas juntas cuando puedo porque así se si le estoy ayudando a mi hijo como se debe y me doy más ideas para ayudarle como aprendi cuando la maestra de preschool nos enseño. Me desanimo muchas veces porque no veo más padres latinos en éstas juntas."
>
> I like to attend these workshops whenever I can because that way I know if I'm helping my son as I should be and I get more ideas on how to help them. I get discouraged sometimes because I don't see more Latino parents in these workshops.

Spanish-speaking parents participated in workshops presented in Spanish, but attendance was often restricted those parents who benefited from the content because they were familiar with it from their

involvement in other parent education activities. This might suggest that while no single workshop can accomplish lasting affects of training, parents can be systematically linked to various activities of training. Parents were attracted to the workshops because they could refresh the skills learned in previous activities. The need for a variety of parent education activities is evident since they serve different purposes. Explicit, however, is the importance of systematic follow-up training to ensure internalization of skills for parents.

Parent participation in State Funded Programs

Two major California State funded programs were operative in Carpinteria to enhance the educational opportunities of Spanish-speaking students: the Bilingual Preschool Program and the Migrant Program. Both of them had a parent involvement component and required programs to involve parents in the design, implementation and evaluation of the program. Both of these programs operated quite differently in the ways that they involved parents.

The school district's preschool program had as its head teacher, Mrs. Baca, a bilingual Colombian woman, who had been a teacher in her own country. She organized her classroom with Spanish as the language of instruction in contexts where all children could interact with her and with peers in culturally relevant experiential tasks. Language development increased because children used language naturally through content. This concept of learning through social interaction between the adult and child was taught to parents in their monthly meetings which were held in the evenings, childcare was provided. Parents selected the monthly topics on what they needed to learn and the teacher and her assistant arranged a presentation for each meeting to

teach the parents. Some of the topics decided by the parents included "disciplining with care," "communicating with children," and "reading to your child". Mrs. Baca made it her goal to educate the parents about the preschool curriculum and about ways to design learning activities with their children at home. Parents in turn viewed the preschool as important because had made a personal investment. They visited the preschool to observe their children any time they wished and organized committees to help the teacher to care for the classroom by providing snacks, carpet cleaning and other chores that needed to done.

In essence, Mrs. Baca designed a preschool curriculum that included teaching parents how to be her co-teachers. She attributed the success of the preschool program to the fact that she was able to teach parents how to support the classroom instruction with development at home. A story told by Mrs. Baca represented her commitment to and success in working with parent education so as to make the home and school curriculum congruent to the extent that children learn in two settings that cooperate with one another.

> Marta (pseudonym) seemed to be willing to learn and to get along with the other children in school but her parents never showed up for the monthly meetings or for special conferences which Mrs. Baca called with the parents. At several visits to the home to try to communicate with the parents, Mrs. Baca observed that the father was usually intoxicated and although the mother seemed to be interested in what the teacher had to say about Marta, she never seemed to be able to get the parents in getting them to visit the classroom and to show up at conferences and monthly parent meetings. Mrs. Baca even threatened not to accept Marta into the

class one day unless she was accompanied by her father and mother. Mrs. Baca always called the employer when she asked the parents to attend such meetings. She had good rapport with many of the major nursery owners and managers in Carpinteria who employed the parents so they were able to arrange with the parents to make up the time they lost when they attended special meetings in the preschool. On that day, Marta arrived early at the preschool with both of her parents. Mrs. Baca was able to explain the preschool curriculum routine and about the monthly meetings which she urged them to attend. The father expressed pleasure with what he saw and said that he never imagined that school was such a wonderful place for his child. The following week, at the next parent meeting, Marta's parents attended. The topic planned for that month was "alcohol and the family." Mrs. Baca did not know that Marta's parents were in the audience. Before the discussion period, the teacher and her assistant dressed in men's clothing and dramatized, by role-playing, how a drunk parent behaves, demonstrating their abusive communication with the family. The discussion that ensued in the parent group had to do with the type of communication that parents must have with their children in order to raise healthy, motivated children and how alcohol inhibits that communication and damages the child's self-esteem. Marta's father walked up to Mrs. Baca after the meeting and, with tears in his eyes, told her that for the first time he had seen a reflection of himself. He added that he never realized that his alcoholism was hurting Marta and his other children. He offered to work with the parent committee that helped to provide snacks, and he followed through with orange juice on the day he was

scheduled. Mrs. Baca reported that a few weeks later she visited Marta's family and the father, quite sober, was watching television with the children.

Marta's story depicts the extent to which Mrs. Baca was committed to the total development of the children in her preschool. Mrs. Baca addressed the family's emotional and psychological needs by showing them how adult behavior affected the children: she also emphasized the importance of caring not just for the children's physical needs but also their learning in school as a way of enhancing their children's self-image. She recognized that once she engaged the parents in their children's schooling, the children's chances for learning in school would be enhanced.

Overall, the preschool teacher insisted on a making the parents co-teachers. The family's language was used to educate parents about the school curriculum, and the natural home activities were used to teach children cognitive concepts. The teacher also utilized the family's foods, recreation, parents' history and occupations to shape her classroom curriculum so that the children valued their language, culture and heritage. Mrs. Baca's approach to involving the families of Spanish-speaking students differed from the way in which the other major State funded program involved parents.

The migrant program served Spanish-speaking students and families who worked in migratory related industries, and spanned grades from first to twelfth. About 100 families participated in the program, which was led by a director. The program required the director to meet with the parents three or four times a year to inform them of the program activities but he usually met with them every two months. About 20-50

parents usually attended. The meetings were scheduled in the evening and childcare was provided.

The director selected the topic and scheduled a speaker for each meeting and provided information pertaining to the family's social needs such as immigration rights and alcoholism in the home. The presentations were conducted in Spanish and lasted about one hour. The director then opened the meeting for questions and comments about the topic. Although the presentations were not designed to train the parents, the content of the information delivered to the group was deemed important to the parents. Parents felt incapable of dealing with the complex problems which their children faced, especially when they reached junior high school. Many of these problems were new to the families who were for the most part traditional Catholic and had raised their children to be respectful of themselves and others. Parents wanted to learn about ways to deal with their children's sexuality, drug problems and dropout problems, particularly in the high school. Although no follow-up was provided to parents on the topics covered, they believed that listening to the different speakers helped them become informed on the various issues. As stated below by Mrs. Martinez, a parent who was a regular participant in the Migrant Program:

> Las presentaciones que escuchamos en el programa migrante son muy importante porque aunque en mi familia, por ejemplo, no tenemos el problema de drogas, podemos comprender como es el problema para otras familias. Yo digo que todo eso nos afecta a la comunidad latina.
>
> The presentations at the migrant program meetings are very important because although we don't have a "drug" problem in my

family, we can understand how the problem exists in many families. I think that all that affects the Latin community.

Although most of the parents who attended the meetings in the Migrant Program believed that the meetings were important for them, the fact remained that relatively few parents were reached at this type of meeting. The majority of the parents in the program did not attend the meetings and the problems discussed concerned but a few of the parents who were regular and frequent participants. Some of the parents who participated in the Migrant Program meetings were also active in the Bilingual Preschool Program. They noticed the absence of many Spanish-speaking parents in the Migrant Program who they believed could benefit from these presentations and meetings and they began a dialogue with each other about an effort to reach other, more isolated, parents.

Conventional and Non-conventional Activities: A Comparison

The involvement of Spanish-speaking parents in specially funded programs varied according to the type of activity as it did in the more conventional activities which the school set-up. The conventional parent involvement efforts were important measures to bring teachers and parents together to identify target areas but they were not, by any means appropriate times for teaching the parents how the school operates or skills to help their children at home. The goals for these activities were incongruent between the home and the school. The parents expected more instruction and frequent communication from the school while teachers expected the parents to take more initiative to inquire about their child's progress on a regular basis.

Parents in the preschool program seemed to have participated more fully in the preschool than in other activities. Mrs. Baca's efforts reflected her objective to make the parents co-teachers with her in order to maximize the students' learning in and out of school. The mutual cooperation between the teacher and the parents was by no means a simple matter to achieve. First of all, she addressed the parents in their language and used the children's culture in the curriculum not in a superficial way but by teaching them to appreciate their language and culture, and thus themselves. Parents participated in their child's preschool program largely because the teacher included them in the decision-making process so that they, in turn, felt ownership in the program. That they shared the responsibility for the program and their children with Mrs. Baca meant that she set the direction for parental involvement. The feature of shared responsibility was absent not only in the conventional activities but also in the non-conventional Migrant Program which involved parents in meetings but made all decisions for them. Parents who were invited to meetings and did not attend claimed that they did not find the meetings important or necessary and their long hours at work precluded their participation. Besides, they believed that teachers should know what to do with the students when they were in school. Essentially, the difference between parents who participate and those who do not is that those who do have recognized that they are a critical part in their children's education. Parents in the preschool program were convinced by the teacher that they were their child's most important teacher and that their viewpoints were valuable in their child's classroom.

The preschool program involved parents more directly in children's learning than the Migrant Program or the conventional district activities. However, it is also necessary to consider that many parents who participated in the Migrant Program and conventional activities noted the importance of the information meetings as general reference, and benefited to some degree over a period of time. But the influence on the family and accommodations in the home setting were more apt to come from the preschool program than from the Migrant Program. This was due to the consistent and systematic training efforts from the preschool teacher versus the lecture format presentation in the Migrant Program. Furthermore, the experience that some parents had in the preschool program carried over into their involvement with the migrant program. This made it possible for some of them to initiate the organization of a leadership group of Spanish-speaking parents who were interested in reaching out to less active Spanish-speaking parents.

What is evident is that the school's conventional efforts to involve parents lacked systematic follow-up; however, the most cogent reason argument for the inadequate nature of these activities is one that was tacit rather than salient in the study. From the organization's point of view, they are doing what is convenient and expedient for them. Neither schools nor the school district as a whole view parent involvement as a priority because they have no real incentives to involve parents. Schools receive no rewards from the school district or the State for involving parents in the schools, except for specially funded programs. While teachers and administrators express the need to have parents in the schools, the reality is that they need parents only when it is convenient for them to help with a difficult child. They have not seen the value of

involving parents on a continuous basis to prevent conflict and problems with children. Rather, parents are brought in usually when a problem exists. In order to have an educated parent who will know how to work along with the teacher and to communicate, schools must view the effort as cost-effective and fund parent education as well as parent-teacher activities. Schools must be evaluated for their effectiveness to achieve a strong parent-school relationship.

COPLA: An Avenue For Sharing Power

Tired of waiting for the schools to deal with the issues, the parents organized themselves to address the gulf between the school and the Spanish-speaking families. The group was initiated when one of the preschool parents who was interested in involving more Spanish-speaking parents in the school activities acknowledged that there were some parents who were very skillful about ways to help their children in school. He was convinced that those more active parents could help other less active parents to become more knowledgeable about the educational system. He approached the Migrant Program Director for a list of parents whose children were involved in the program. He wanted to contact a few of the parents who attended more regularly with the intent of forming a committee of Spanish-speaking parents who could help others with less skills. The efforts that ensued to mobilize Spanish-speaking parents exemplified awareness, mobilization, commitment and effectiveness on the part of the parent group that organized other parents.

Awareness in the context of parent education refers to the consciousness of the Spanish-speaking parents about their social environment and the conditions under which they operate as a

fundamental basis for change. As a result of their active participation in the various settings, a small parent cohort met and shared their experiences and recognized that they needed training in ways to communicate with the school as well as strategies to help their children with schoolwork at home. This collective realization brought a small group of parents together to organize COPLA, a acronym for Comite de Padres Latinos "Committee for Latin Parents" that in Spanish means a verse in a poem). Their purpose was to understand the school system and their rights and responsibility as parents. In Carpinteria, four strong advocates reached out to assist this group of parents to build awareness although they did not work together as a team. The all held different positions in the school district. Two were teachers, one a special project director and the fourth a Migrant Education Coordinator (Cummins, 1986, Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

Realizing that it was possible to involve parents who had been isolated from the schools, a small cohort of parents was motivated to organize, the group that became COPLA, exhibiting a spirit of cooperation and enthusiasm for the notion of working together. The original group of seven parents met to organize as a committee and to hold elections so that all other Spanish-speaking parents had a chance to vote for the selection of the people who would serve in their committee.

A key goal of the COPLA organization has been for parents to learn from each other ways to help their children progress through school and to become a support system to each other. In addition to organizing conference workshops, parents shared their experience, which led to improved educational conditions for their children. An illustration of this process was observed at an elementary school parent meeting held for

the purpose of organizing the Spanish-speaking parents. The District COPLA members were speaking to the local parents about their rights and responsibilities in getting involved in their children's education (also present at the meeting were bilingual teachers and the principal).

During the course of the meeting one of the school parents raised her hand and directed her questions to the COPLA parents. "Yo tengo un problema con mi hijo que ya va en el quinto grado pero va muy atrasado en inglés. ¿Que me aconsejan?" (I have a problem with my son who is in the 5th grade and is far behind in English. What do you suggest that I do?). A parent in the COPLA leadership group responded, "Yo comprendo de lo que usted dice porque yo tengo un hijo en la Jr. Hi. y me dicen que tiene mucho problema con el inglés y el también estuvo en ésta escuela. Yo digo que tiene usted que hablar con los maestros y insistir que le digan como es que le estan enseñando el inglés. Tambien se tiene que hablar con el director porque ellos deben de saber que es lo que enseñan los maestros y son los que se encargan a ordenar las materias." (I understand what you're saying because I have a son in the Junior High School and they tell me that he has lots of problems with English. I think you need to talk to the teachers and insist that they tell you how they teach English. You also need to talk to the principal because they're in charge of ordering materials for the teachers.) A teacher stood up and addressed the parent's concern about her child not knowing English. She spoke to the multitude of reasons why some children have difficulty in learning English. She assured the parents that English was taught every day in the bilingual classroom and that recently, they had ordered more materials for instruction in their

English as a Second Language Program for the school so that all the bilingual teachers could coordinate the ESL program.

Another member of the COPLA group suggested that parents whose childcare were having difficulty learning English should get together with teachers in the school and pursue the issue further. Another teacher spoke up at that point and suggested to the parents that perhaps one way of beginning a dialogue between the parents and the teachers about the ESL issue was to have the teachers present their ESL curriculum at the school COPLA meeting once they got organized. The parents agreed that they wanted to continue the discussion with the teachers and that dealing with the topic would be an important issue to raise at the school COPLA meetings. The school principal and the teachers felt encouraged that the parents wanted to deal with the topic. Although the parent's initial complaint about the ESL topic had been raised to a school level concern, one of the parents in the COPLA leadership group returned to the initial question raised by the parent. He urged the parent who raised the question to visit the school and talk to the teacher because working in concert with the teacher is really what matters. He added that the reason that the bilingual preschool had been so successful with the Spanish-speaking children was that the teacher insisted on having the parents become involved with her and become informed about the classroom instruction.

As a follow up on the parent who raised the issue of her son's English proficiency, she did contact the teacher and they talked about some of the problems that he had in learning English. The teacher agreed to keep the parent informed about her son's progress through frequent reports. The teacher encouraged the parent to talk with her

anytime she did not understand a report or when she had any questions about the subject.

Central to empowerment in the Carpinteria is the concept of "critical reflection process" which is defined as follows:

> "a process that engages people in careful examination of the assumptions that guide self, family and institutional norms, values, policies, and decisions that direct our lives including institutional policies and practices in government, education, and other social services. As a consequence, the group's awareness and consciousness of their shared experience (past and present) becomes the basis for collective action." (Barr, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, Freire, 1973)

The major areas of change which have ensued up to this point through the collective critical reflection process and which are the core features of the empowerment process:

1. They discussed their common history and experience with schools.
2. They shared their realization that their feelings of isolation in the community were common to most parents yet specific to Spanish-speaking families due to their lack of power and representation.
3. They acknowledged that there existed a lack of information regarding school and they committed themselves to learning how schools operate and how parents could participate most effectively.
4. They confronted common stereotypes imposed on them that have been limitations in their school involvement. For example, they dispelled the notions that their limited English ability presented involvement with the school; that their limited formal education

prohibited their involvement; that working long hours excused their participation; that Mexican could not organize themselves.

5. They constructed an egalitarian system of interaction to relate to each other during their meetings based on mutual respect for everyone's ideas.
6. They realized that maximum support for their children's education meant mutual cooperation between the families and schools.
7. They committed to organize activities to encourage frequent and meaningful interaction between parents and teachers.

Through critical reflection, parents have shared their personal experience in schools and how they have felt isolated in dealing with the school system in the U.S. Prior to forming the collective, many parents believed that they could not actively participate in the schools because they did not speak English and they did not have schooling in the U.S. Through critical reflection this parents learned from others who believed that participating in their children's learning had more to do with sharing their world view with their children and shepherding them through school regardless of the language differences between the home and the school. This process was in no way a simple or painless process. In their attempt to learn how the schools operated and what it meant to provide healthy learning environments for their children at home, parents identified and confronted some belief about themselves that prevented them from advocating for their children in the schools. By identifying these issues they realized that knowledge required to participate in their children's education was acquired in social context and that through COPLA they could support each other in learning practices that would orient them to new beliefs about themselves.

COPLA established a system in each school by which one teacher would provide systematic linkages between the school and the parents. They organized a district-wide committee and during the course of one year the group organized satellite school-site groups at the three elementary schools. COPLA held monthly meetings for their district-wide committee on the first Friday of the month. The school-site COPLA meetings were held on alternate Fridays so as not to conflict with those of the district COPLA. Each school had two parent representatives on the district committee who reported to the group about their activities. They also requested assistance on ways to organize information meetings for parents in their respective schools. At one of the COPLA meetings, the parents representing Maple School discussed their plan to hold a parent meeting to inform them of procedures for communicating with the school.

> The Spanish-speaking parents from Maple School announced that they were planning to have their monthly meeting with the Spanish-speaking parents. During the meeting they wanted to teach the parents how to communicate with the school in various situations for reasons described by one of the Maple School parent leaders: "El problema, como lo veo en la escuela Maple es que no saben los padres de familia como hablar con los maestros y con la directora. Así es que se sienten muy aislados y no veen la importancia porque no saben que es su deber y responsabilidad de comunicarse frequentemente con los maestros." The problem, the way I see it in Maple School is that the parents do not know how to talk with the teachers and the principal. Therefore, they feel isolated and they don't see the importance of communicating frequently with the

teachers. Other parents in the group advised the leaders from Maple School to consider the idea of presenting "real" problems for the parents to discuss in learning how to communicate with the school. COPLA members volunteered to raise specific problems at the meeting and direct them the parent leaders, the principal and the director of special programs who were invited to attend. During the COPLA meetings, the parents rehearsed with each other as to how to respond to the various problems which parents might pose about communicating with the school. At the conclusion of their meeting, the parents always took time for a summary evaluation. Many of them expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to rehearse their part of the responses plan for their school-site meeting because they were able to share knowledge about dealing with the school.

The cooperative behaviors of the COPLA members in the meeting described above illustrate the effort to organize themselves and other parents in the schools for the purpose of raising awareness about the importance of parents' communicating with the school. Their personal experience in dealing with the school and the contact they had with the parents made it possible for them to understand the parents' need for training in order to communicate better with the school about their children's education.

At the Friday evening Maple School meeting, twenty parents were present in addition to the director of special projects and the principal who commented that this was the largest group of Spanish-speaking parents that she had seen at any one meeting at her school. Everyone present spoke Spanish, including the principal, although the school personnel was less proficient. Mrs. Serna, the designated

chairperson, introduced everyone and presented the purpose of the meeting. An active parent had been designated to give a personal testimony about the need to participate in the schools and learn how to help children in the home. Following the parent's discussion she showed a video entitled, "Padres los Primeros Maestros" Parents the First Teachers. She began by posing a question and invited discussion, "¿A que punto ven ustedes la necesidad comunicarse con los maestros de sus niños? When do you see that it's necessary to communicate with your children's teachers? After a brief silence, the parents began to raise their hands and gave examples of occasions on which they contacted the teachers. Motives ranged from the need to administer medication in the school to concerns about low reading achievement. Mrs. Serna posed another question for the teachers to contemplate, "¿Que pasa cuando tienen ustedes una queja y ya se comunicaron con el maestro pero el maestro no les hace caso y no se resuelve el caso? What happens when you have a complaint and you've already communicated with the teacher and nothing was resolved? Before any parent could answer the question, the principal interjected her desire for parents to acknowledge her open door policy. Parents were invited to come to talk with her in case they had any problems or questions with any teachers. She promised to help them solve the problem. The director of special programs added that if the parents did not get action from the school that he should be contacted. The principal took the floor again, and recommending that the group become a fund-raising organization to help the school purchase instructional materials because the school district was low in funds. The parents, however, quickly protested

about their group being relegated to a fund-raising group. One parent eloquently synthesized the sentiments of the group in his comment, "Yo veo que usted [directora] está interesada con sus prioridades de la escuela y nosotros como padres latinos estamos dispuestos en ayudarle pero no queremos que solo nos llame cuando tenga algun actividad para conseguir fondos. Nosotros nos organizamos para compartir uno con otro lo que sabemos sobre la educación de nuestros niños y nesesitamos su ayuda y la de maestros para que nos hablen de los asuntos de la educación. Me parece que la meta de este grupo sería más bien le serviría a usted en llevar la queja de la escases de las materias a los directores y a la mesa directiva. Veemos que lo que tenemos que alcansar aqui es algo cooperativo donde los padres latinos se sientan capacitados para comunicarse con los maestros y los directores aqui en las escuelas y que puedan ayudarles a sus niños en la casa."

I see that you [principal] have your priorities for this school and as Latino Parents we want to help you, but we do not want you to call us just for fund raising activities. We are organized to share with each other what we know about our children's education and we need your help and that of the teachers to talk to us about educational issues. It seems to me that this group's goal would be more along the lines of carrying a complaint to the district office and to the school board regarding the shortage of materials. We see that what we have to accomplish here is something cooperative where the Latino parents are competent to communicate with the teachers and the principal here in the schools and to be able to help their children.

Another parent interrupted his clarification and added, "Nuestro propósito es de concientisar a los padres latinos para que se sientan que cuenten. "Our purpose is to raise the consciousness of the Latin parents so that they feel like they're important.

The power relations during the Maple School meeting revealed the differences in goals for parental involvement in the school. Parents felt empowered to present their goal for their organization and for the meeting. They had already established their purpose for organizing and believed strongly in their commitment. The principal, on the other hand, operated according to the needs of the school as she perceived them. The absence of awareness about what was necessary to involve Spanish-speaking parents in the school dichotomized the administration from the parents. This evidenced what LeCompte and Bennett (1988) concluded: parents are not the problem nor should they be blamed for not participating, rather the problem is structural. However, the realization of the distance between what the parents needed and what the administration wanted helped to confirm the parents' commitment to their COPLA organization.

At the end of the first year, the parents that participated at the district level committee evaluated their activities as largely successful. They believed that they had accomplished most of their goals in spite of some miscommunication within the group and between the parents and the school. The issue of miscommunication was analyzed as a problem of not centralizing their communication for the group and during the meeting, and so they devised a system for centralizing their communication. The success of the COPLA organization was summarized by Mrs. Ramos about her experience with the committee:

Yo cuando comense a participar en éste comite, yo pensé que lo estaba haciendo por mis hijos que todos están en la high school, pero según llegue a ver que lo estaba haciendo para todos los niños del districto porque con ayudándonos nosotros mismos todos benefician. When I first began to participate in this committee, I thought that I was just doing it for my children who are all in the high school, but I soon learned that I was doing it for every child in the district because when we help ourselves, everyone benefits.

Although parents felt successful that they had been able to reach Spanish-speaking parents in each school and that a system had been established that would bring teachers and parents together in a more systematic way, they believed that much work had to be done by the school district to support parental involvement in the schools. The concern was that the school district had yet to train teachers to work with parents. Mr. Ramirez indicated that while it was important for parents to recognize their power, it was equally important to have the school recognize their responsibility to work with the parents. He addressed a district administrator with the following comments:

Ya nosotros reconocemos el valor de estar envueltos con la escuela porque es de beneficio para nuestros niños. Pero, tambien éste esfuerzo tiene que ser en cooperacion con los maestros. Todavía falta voluntad en la parte de muchos maestros que no quieren estar aqui en la tarde después de escuela para juntarse con los padres y también que hay veces que lo maltratan a uno muy mal cuando hace uno preguntas. ...Le responden a los padres como si no supieran que era respeto.

> We [parents] already recognize the value of being involved in the schools because it's of benefit to the children. But the effort has to be in cooperation with the teachers. There still needs to be lots of good will on the part of the teachers who don't want to be here in the evening to meet with the parents. There are still times when the teachers mistreat the parents if you ask them questions. ...They talk to parents as if they didn't know what respect was.

The call for a cooperative venture between the parents and the teachers meant the district had to take more initiative in training teachers to deal with parents. Mr. Ramirez's recommendation to make the teachers more responsive to the parents was heard and put on the school district's plans for teacher development. This call for training teachers meant that the teachers had to understand the parents' needs as the parents had attempted to educate themselves by organizing COPLA. The issue of training teachers to deal more effectively with parents was a goal for the parents and they wanted to get the cooperation of the district to accomplish it just as they had been able to do with other policy issues like having communication sent out in Spanish to the Spanish-speaking families described in the process model, Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

The ability of parents to influence the allocation of resources from power settings like the school is determined by the extent of people's potential to develop. The parent empowerment process as a result of collective critical reflection has made sharing power possible through more active involvement of parents who tend to be isolated and marginal in the educational system.

Power Based Conceptualizations of Parent Involvement

Three basic dimensions of power can be defined based on conventional, nonconventional and COPLA activities in Carpinteria (see figure 2). The conventional type of parent involvement activities represents a domination of power on the part of the district and their attempts to make the family conform to the school. The nonconventional parent involvement activities represent an attempt of power sharing on the part of the district to have the parents participate in the schools and to learn how to help their children to succeed. Because the agendas are set by the school personnel in this model, the schools maintain most of control of the power although they make some effort to share it. The third model of parent participation involves an autonomous group of parents who set their own agendas and design a context in which that invite the school personnel to share the decision-making about

programs, policies and practices related to the education of their children.

Insert Figure 2 Here

In this model, the parents concede to make necessary changes both in the home and in their communication with the schools that will benefit the overall education of their children, but the agendas are theirs as are their choices about how they will proceed to make those changes. Thus, the joint effort on the part of schools and the parents makes this model one of empowerment which enables both the family and the schools to benefit. When both institutions cooperate with each other solutions to concerns can be found more readily. The empowerment process does not guarantee parsimonious solutions, rather is a process that provides a context for discourse which make negotiation possible because a basic premises underlying the process assume that people affected by specific services, in this case, the families affected by the school programs, are the most capable of making choices and decisions.

Conclusion

Linkages between the home and the school occurred on many levels for Spanish-speaking parents in Carpinteria and different linkages support different relationships between teachers and parents. The view that minority parents, in particular, Spanish-speaking parents, are not involved in school has to be understood in context of the activities provided to them by the school and those they themselves create. School activities which have been institutionalized to involve parents have

usually ignored the needs of minority groups who are unfamiliar with the school's expectations. Schools must examine the non-conventional activities, in which minority parents do participate in order to learn the needs of the Spanish-speaking families. In this study, the non-conventional activities, like those coordinated by the special programs serving Spanish-speaking students, validated the social and cultural experience which allowed them to feel a part of their children's schooling. The support group created by the COPLA group recognized and addressed the needs of the parents to develop their skills to participate in their children's schooling.

The empowerment process does not guarantee to ameliorate conflict between the family and the school. In fact in some cases, the conflict may appear to intensify as a result of the availability of more information in the hands of parents who once felt isolated from the school. What can be expected is a social framework that involves aware parents who are committed to engaging school members in dealing with issues about their children's education.

It is, however, unrealistic to expect that all of these activities to involve parents will arise from intrinsic motivation of school personnel. It is realistic, though, to establish structural means that support school efforts for involving parents in their children is education beyond a superficial level. Teachers need release time to meet with parents at times when it is convenient for both; principals also need adequate funding to hire personnel that speak the language of the major language groups in the community; and let us not forget, schools must invest in a complete parent education program from preschool to high school. Only with a total commitment of policies, funding and well developed plans

from the state, county, district, and the school level can educators expect those who have little comprehension of the school system to be active in the schools. Short of this, we can only look forward to continual conflict from parents who feel that their only recourse is to act against the school that they view as a resistant agent rather than work cooperatively with it.

The relationship between, institutional and personal transformation is complex indeed. In Carpinteria, parent participation affected institutional arrangements and enhanced personal feelings of competence which in turn encouraged institutions and developed an awareness that resulted in increased participation. The ability of participants to influence the allocation of resources from power settings determined the extent of people's potential to develop as noted partially in Bronfenbrenner's hypothesis.

Conventional school activities which have been institutionalized to involve parents tend to relegate all the power to the institution and have usually ignored the needs of groups particularly of those with a different language who are unfamiliar with the school's expectations.

In this study, the non-conventional activities validated the families' social and cultural experience which allowed them to feel a part of their children's schooling thus achieved a better balance of power between home and school. The involvement created by the preschool teacher and the COPLA committee recognized and addressed the needs of the parents to develop their skills to participate in their children's schooling.

The non-conventional activities accommodate parental involvement as a process, not a conclusion. The bilingual preschool teacher, for example, made it possible for Spanish-speaking parents to participate in their children's schooling by involving them in the decision making of

preschool activities and by holding them accountable for their participation and following up on their progress throughout the time that their children spent in the preschool learning how to teach through the teacher's modeling. Preschool parents were able to affect the school curriculum and in turn, the teacher effected change in the home learning setting through the process of power sharing. The preschool program, however, was unusual in its goal to train parents to co-teach. Parental involvement in other non-conventional activities made it possible to learn the importance of becoming aware of their rights and responsibilities in the schools. While parents' involvement in the preschool served as training for them about the schools, they followed the teacher's agenda and she provided them with instruction. Parents assumed responsibilities for their committee work in the preschool based on her direction.

On a district-wide level, the COPLA organization built on the strengths of the parents who had been active in their children's education. Through a rigorous critical reflection process they build a structure that includes parents and school personnel in dialogue with each other for their common purpose, the students. Their ability to maintain their autonomy of power separate from the school and simultaneously sharing power with the school speaks to the parents' commitment to their children. They joined forces to move beyond the perceived limitations making their process one of empowerment. Policies and school district activities must support the teacher/parent relationship so they can interact with each other in ways that positively affect children's education in the home and school.

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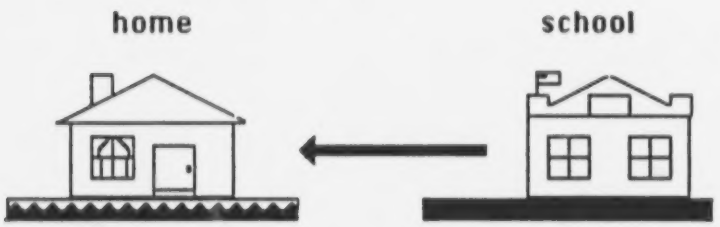
Figure 1

PARENT INVOLVEMENT EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

Concha
Delgado-Gaitan
UC Santa Barbara
1990

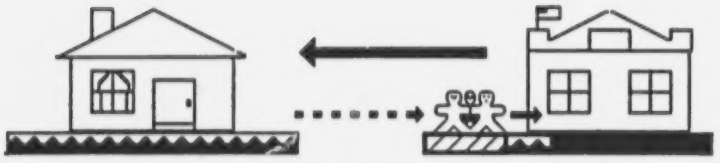
Figure 2

Power Relations in Parent Involvement



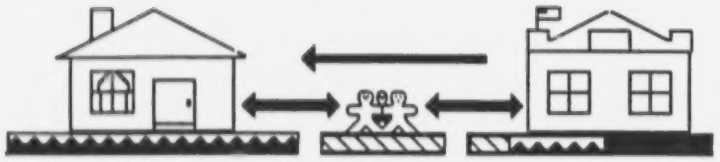
one-dimensional

Conventional parent involvement activities



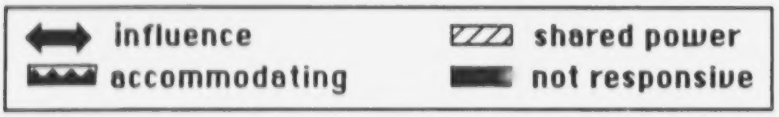
two-dimensional

Non-conventional involvement activities



three-dimensional

COPLA
(Comite de Padres Latinos)



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